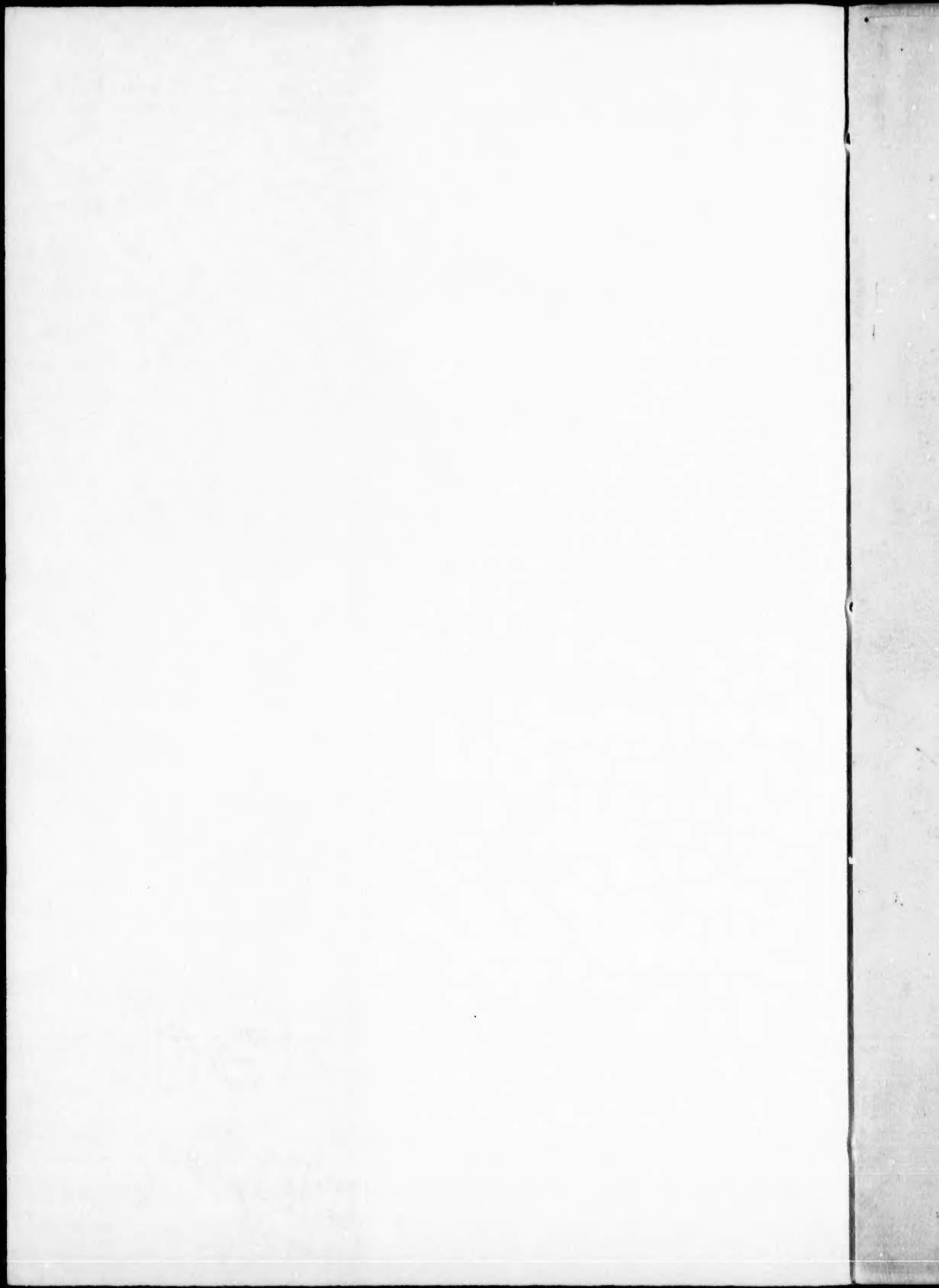




THE EXPERIENCE
OF AN
OLD COUNTRY PEDLER
AMONG THE
MONTREAL SERVANT GIRLS
AND THEIR MISTRESSES,
BY N. MURRAY.



Entered, according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1887, by
N. MURRAY, in the Office of the Minister of Agriculture.



HUGH'S OBVIOUS LEANING.

(APPROPOS OF THE GREAT DOMESTIC CONTROVERSY IN MONTREAL.)

SIR.—The animus of the *Star* is not difficult to discover. We are told that both sides of the question would be given, but what do we find? Is there one letter giving the faults and shortcomings of servants? Not one! Is there one letter bearing evidence of coming from a mistress who knows anything of the real troubles and trials of housekeepers? Not one!—*Correspondent Montreal News*.—From *Grip*.

"MISTRESS AND MAID.

"THE AMUSING EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS OF A MONTREAL PEDLAR—A TRAINING INSTITUTION FOR YOUNG HOUSEKEEPERS.

"An 'Old Country Pedlar,' (Mr. N. Murray) has published a sixteen-page pamphlet giving his views on the much vexed mistress and maid question. Mr. Murray speaks from his experience, and says what he has to say in a racy, straightforward manner. Mr. Murray is happy to say that the Montreal ladies will compare favorably with those of any other place he has lived in, but the whiter the general flock the more conspicuous will the black sheep appear. On the suggestion of a public training institution Mr. Murray says: 'What I think is needed is a training institution for young housekeepers, who have never been taught by their mothers in the mysteries of housekeeping.' He has a good deal to say on the average young lady of the business houses. 'Last winter I saw some girls shivering with cold, with plenty of coal and kindling wood beside them, and they were too proud to make a fire for themselves in the absence of a male attendant. The Lord keep the young men of our city from joining in wedlock with such stylish young ladies!'

"A number of very pleasing experiences with 'ladies in the true sense of the word' are recorded, and the 'old country pedlar' stays to observe that 'in the houses of the leading business men of Montreal there is no noise about the servant question.' One of the fundamental points of this question is that of 'followers,' one from which arise, directly or indirectly, many of the misunderstandings. Mr. Murray records the story of a fellow-boarder of his in Glasgow, who, out on his morning business, had smiled at a servant girl he knew. 'The mistress came down to the store to lodge a complaint against him for having the "impertinence to smile at her servant girl through the window." Perhaps she was at a ball the night before, and had the arms of another woman's husband round her waist.'

"Mr. Murray also says that he could point out several ladies in Montreal that, seeing mistress and servant engaged together on some household affair, one would not know but the servant was the daughter. Instances of the other extreme are also given, but the decision is arrived at, that 'servants and mistresses in Montreal at present are just on as good terms as they used to be.' In Mr. Murray's opinion, formed *a posteriori*, impertinence is contagious; when he met a rude, unkind mistress, he generally found her manner reflected in the daughter of the house, and even communicated to the pet-dog of the establishment.

"In an appendix, Mr. Murray emphasizes the evil consequences that must attend mistresses deliberately teaching their girls to tell lies in saying they are 'not in' when they are. Another side thought more worthy of consideration than almost any other is the Sabbath question. "A great many of the servants, both male and female, have to do a great deal of work on Sunday that is neither the work of necessity nor mercy." Several apposite quotations from the Pauline epistles and the Pentateuch bring a very sensible and entertaining booklet to a close."—*Witness*, Nov. 14.

MONTREAL SERVANT GIRLS AND THEIR MISTRESSES.

As one whose business, for the last twelve months, depended mostly upon the good will of the Montreal servant girls and their mistresses, I was naturally very much interested in the present agitation going on in the *Star*. I wrote a letter to the *Star* stating my views on the subject, but for reasons best known to that journal it has not yet made its appearance in print. The letter I wrote to the *Daily News* on the subject appeared without delay, and as everyone that saw my letter on the subject seemed to approve of its statements, I was encouraged to write after this manner, so that I will not be under any obligations to anyone for getting my views into print. Although I may state some facts that may not be very tasteful to some, I wish it distinctly to be understood that I have great respect for the Montreal ladies in general. I have travelled a great part of this country and also of the old country and I am happy to say that the Montreal ladies will compare favourably with those of any other place where I have been. Of course there are exceptions to this rule like most other rules, and these exceptions are the main spring of the present agitation. Perhaps my respect for the Montreal ladies is one of the reasons that I stayed longer in Montreal than I have stayed in any other place that I have ever been in, since I first left home about fourteen years ago. It is a fact that cannot be denied that the Montreal people will compare favorably with any other people in the world for kindness of disposition. Perhaps that is one reason that there is so much notice taken of those who are rude, unkind, uncharitable and selfish. The whiter the sheep the more conspicuous will the black one appear.

One writer on the "Question" in the *Star* insinuates that the cause of the trouble is that most of the ladies of Canada rose from next to nothing, and that consequently they did not have the upbringing which was necessary according to the English woman's

view of the subject. Now that is a very poor way to think of getting over the difficulty. If a man is born in a stable, that does not make him a horse, much less if you put a gold ring in the nose of a pig and dress her in silk and scarlet will she be a lady. The true characteristic of a lady or gentleman is nobleness of disposition. Now nobleness of disposition and its opposite meanness and selfishness is found in all classes of society, rich and poor, of both sexes.

Theory may do very well for short acquaintance, but those that have to live together under the same roof from one end of the year to the other have to look at the subject from a matter of fact point of view. Our Englishwoman who, I presume, is of high birth, shows her own want of gentleness by looking down on those under her in point of birth in the same way as those that she refers to look down upon their servants, because they have not been so fortunate as some of them in getting married to men carrying long purses, in many cases purses not their own. At least the purse may belong to themselves, but what is in it may belong to someone else.

Some of the mistresses think it would be a good plan to found a public institution to train up servant girls. This might be a good thing for foundlings or orphans, but do they think that girls coming in from the country looking for employment as domestic servants, will enter such an institution (I suppose they may enter it when founded) to undergo a training to suit them. I suppose one of the first text books in that institution would be about obedience to impertinent ladies. If girls are not trained for domestic service before they leave home, good-bye to them. Some of them of course may have to learn many things at first on leaving home, but if they can stay for any length of time in the one place, surely they can learn if they are of a teachable disposition, but who is going to teach them. In a great many cases girls in this country as soon as they leave school in large towns are sent to some factory or shop where they stay till they get acquainted maybe with some clerk, or tailor, or counter-jumper and after a while get married, the bride knowing next to nothing about the duties incumbent on young housekeepers. Hence the cause of the trouble at

present. What I think is needed is a training institution for young housekeepers who have never been taught by their mothers in the mysteries of housekeeping. I do not think anyone will deny that domestic servant girls make better housekeepers and better wives than shop or factory girls on an average. The only way that the factory or shop girls have the advantage over the servant girls is that they have a better opportunity of getting acquainted with young men, so that inferior articles get disposed of first on account of a better market.

Of course I do not mean that because a girl is a shop or factory girl she is not competent to be a housekeeper if she was fortunate enough to have had a mother that could teach her housekeeping. I am acquainted with several young ladies in business houses who would be quite insulted if anyone insinuated that they would ever have to do their own washing. The idea!! Some of them getting \$3 and \$4 a week and they have to hire a washerwoman once a week and give her a dollar or seventy-five cents a day and her three meals. That is the way to make money(?) Earn it in small handfuls and spend it in shovelfuls. When they get married they are going to get everything ready made. One thing they cannot get ready made, and that is knowledge. There is no royal road to learning, and if they do not know anything about housekeeping before they get married they will have to learn it by sore experience after they get married. Last winter I observed some ridiculous instances of pride among girls in business houses. I saw some girls shivering with cold with plenty of coal and kindling wood, paper and matches alongside of them, and they were too proud to make a fire for themselves in the absence of a male attendant. The Lord keep the young men of our city from joining in wedlock with such stylish ladies. Any one that has to work for a living I think the first lesson they should learn is how to help themselves. To those that have plenty means at their disposal I have nothing to say as long as they use in a proper way those that they engage to do their work. Whenever they abuse those that in God's providence are placed under them I would remind them that there is nothing so high that it cannot be brought down, and the higher the elevation the greater the fall.

Believing that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, I am going to give illustrations of four different classes in connection with this question, viz., good and bad mistresses, and good and bad servants. When I speak of good mistresses and good servants, I mean the majority of mistresses and servants, as I have reasons to believe that the majority of them treat each other fair and square. The surest way of finding how a mistress and her servant agree is to find out the length of service. A mistress that generally has the same girls for two or three years is generally an ordinarily good mistress, and a girl that generally stays two or three years in the same place is generally a good servant. Of course there are instances when girls and mistresses separate in good friends. Sometimes the girl might wish to get more wages than the mistress can afford to give, and sometimes the mistress might have more work to do than the girl would like to do. These are reasons on which mistress and servant may separate without any bad feeling, and why should they not? This is a free country and anyone has a right to go and come where he or she likes as long as they behave themselves properly.

This brings me in mind of a letter I saw in the *Witness*, some time ago, quoted from some American journal. Some mistresses think when they get a good girl that it is not right to be instrumental in any way of improving the girl's condition. No one should offer her higher wages than she is getting in her present situation, or in any other way better her condition without first telling the mistress of such intentions. The logic is that we should do to others as we would that others should do to us. Indeed!!

These ladies would not like anyone to take away their servants from them when they get good ones, therefore they say they should not offer a girl higher wages than she is getting in her present situation whether she deserves it or not. What is sauce for the goose is also sauce for the gander. Just carry this argument a little further, please. Supposing the husband of one of these ladies that have such notions of right and wrong was getting a certain salary from some company, and some other company found out that that man would really be worth more money to them than he was getting in his present situation. How would it

do to offer him a couple hundreds more? The other company cannot afford to give him that much so we will secure him. This is business, you know. This is fair and square enough. No business man with common sense would find any fault with this transaction. But when it comes to deal with the poor servants, another view entirely is taken of the question. I think some people must have some inkling of the notions of the old slavery days in their heads yet.

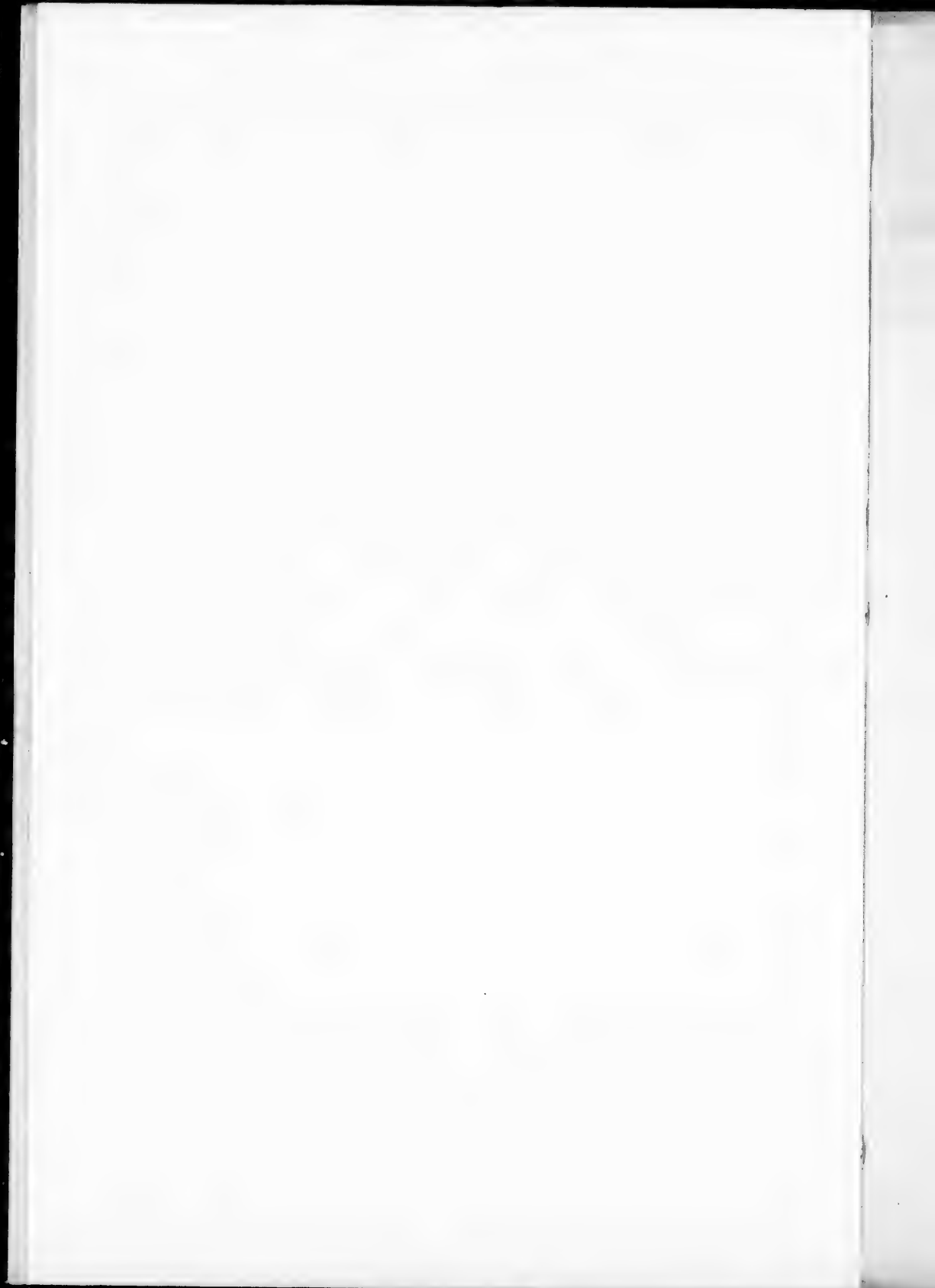
When once they get a good servant they wish to retain her for their own advantage. They do not wish her to know but as little as possible about anything but what is to their own advantage. These are selfish mistresses, they belong to the bad class of mistresses.

Now let me give a few instances of my observation about what I call ladies in the true sense of the word. I never enquired about their connections with the aristocracy. The point in question is how they treat those they come in contact with. A year ago last summer, in the early part of the summer, I commenced peddling pictures, music, etc., going round the houses of the best class of people in Montreal, the servant girls and the mistresses being my best customers. One fine morning I wandered out as far as Cote des Neiges road. I came to a splendid house and as I thought the house was too grand to venture to the front door, I went round to the kitchen, and tried my luck among the servants without any success. As I was about going away I noticed that there was a lady at the door watching me and my unsuccessful efforts to sell anything to the girls. She passed no remarks and I went away and bade them all good day as good-naturedly as a pedler could be expected to do after an unsuccessful effort to make a sale. As I was opening the gate going away the LADY, for she was a lady, called me back and asked me to show her my goods, which, of course, I was only too glad to do. She examined all the articles that I had for sale and said there was nothing there that she really needed, but she would buy some from me to encourage me. I do not remember exactly the amount of the purchase now, but I remember this, that the kind words of that lady cheered me all day and I made good sales that day. She drew

my attention to some fine paintings hanging on the wall, all painted by members of the family. Now, if anyone told me that this lady was guilty of ill-using her servants I would not believe it, because I always find out on enquiry that ladies like that treat other people in the same manner, and everyone that comes in contact with them, instead of cursing them in their hearts, blesses them out of gratitude, and these ladies live in peace and quietness while the other kind are always in hot water.

One point that I observed is that in the houses of the leading business men of Montreal there is no noise about the servant question. On turning up the directory I find that the trouble between servant and mistress is generally in the house of some clerk or tailor. One lady (?) that abused me very badly was the wife of a tailor, another the wife of an accountant, two the wives of railroad clerks, etc. I don't mean that railroad clerks or their wives are all responsible for this, as I came across some very civil ladies not very far from Montreal who are good customers of mine and their husbands are clerks. Some of the present mistresses, I presume, never were servants themselves, never saw any servants in their father's house, if they did it is so long ago that they forgot how their mothers used their servants, and, worse still, they never learnt housekeeping themselves so they are in a terrible predicament. The girls that know their work will not stay with them, and those that they can get to stay are those that know perhaps nearly as little as themselves about housekeeping. The great rub is, also, that bad mistresses and bad girls get so often put together—Greek meets Greek. In the registry offices the ladies in charge in a good many cases know the two sides of the question. Some of the writers in the *Star* found fault with the keepers of registry offices for having their favorites. What a wonder! Everyone has their favorites, only those that are born in Grumbling street and die discontented. It is really too bad that these registry keepers would not send the best girl they have on their books to a cruel, hard-hearted mistress. On the other hand it is a regular shame that shiftless, restless, worthless girls could not conscientiously be recommended to a sensible, kind and considerate mistress, that gives good wages and other privileges accordingly.

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Another side of the "Question" is the difficulty that the servant girls have in a great many cases, to treat their gentlemen friends, if they have any, as they used to treat them at home. This is a delicate subject, but it has something to do with the misunderstanding between many of the girls and their mistresses. Some of the girls have not pluck enough to make any enquiries about this subject before engaging, hence misunderstandings arise afterwards, which undermine the harmony which might otherwise be between the servant and her mistress. When I was in Glasgow, a fellow-boarder of mine, told me one night of a comical incident that happened in the course of the day. He was out in the morning taking in the orders for a large grocery in Hillhead. As he was passing the window he smiled at the servant girl, with whom he was well acquainted. The mistress happened to notice him, and a few hours afterwards she came down to the store to lodge a complaint against him for having the "impertinence to smile at her servant girl through the window." Why did she not wait till the girl herself complained? Perhaps she was at a ball the night before, and had the arms of another woman's husband round her waist. Oh, there would be no harm in that! "*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*" There is no harm in what they do; but there is a lot of harm in what the poor girls do. They cannot trust them. The daughters entertain their dudes in the parlor with music, and perhaps dancing, but the servant, in many cases, is afraid to tell any of her friends to come in and sit down for a little while. The result is, the poor girl, in a good many cases, gets slighted by her gentlemen friends. What does her mistress care for that, an old maid will suit her just as well? Why don't she advertise for an old maid, when she advertises for a servant? Or, why don't she advertise for a girl that does not wish to have any gentlemen friends coming to see her? Now to give instances of kind, considerate ladies. I could point out several ladies in Montreal, and if a stranger saw the mistress and servant engaged together in some household affairs, he would not know but the servant was the daughter. I know of an instance where the mistress left Montreal for New York, the husband having disposed of his share of the business he was in, that the mistress and servant

were so much interested in one another, that the mistress opened a correspondence with her former servant. That lady never has any trouble with her servants. Last summer I was canvassing at the very far end of Dorchester street. The day was very hot. I rang the bell, and a nice looking little girl came to the door. God bless her and her mother! I asked for a drink of water. Herself or her mother never saw me before, to my knowledge. After a few minutes the little girl came out with a large glass of strawberry wine. Do you think that a warm-hearted lady like that is engaged in the present agitation between the girls and the mistresses? I don't believe it. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Another lady, out at Cote St. Antoine, when I came to the door, spoke civilly to me, gave me some orders and gave me the address of her sister in the city, and through her I got several orders. This lady could do her own work if she had to do it, but she can afford a servant.

I could give plenty of instances where not only the mistress herself is rude and unkind, but that unkindness and impertinence are also to be found in the children. Like mother like daughter. Oh, dear fellow young men, keep your distance from the daughters of an unkind, inconsiderate mother. Nature has made me very observant, as one writer in the *Star* said. I always thought impertinence was a very contagious disease, even the little dog himself is impertinent, and he cannot help it, he was not trained otherwise. The little training he got consisted of a few lessons about how to bark at all the pedlers, canvassers, beggars, etc., not at the washerwoman, he must not bark at her, they need her services. The most annoying part of the dog's conduct is, that he scares away Mary Jane's fellow when he accidentally passes that way in the evening. And I would give one short piece of advice to the servant girls: don't hire in a house where the lad you love will be afraid to come to see you home, or call for you any time it is proper to do so. You have just as much right to the company of your sweetheart as Miss Maggie, if you only be smart enough and good enough for him. The principal distinction between you and your mistress is a matter of dollars and cents. The best servants are always the best mistresses, and the

best mistresses would make the best servants if they had to do it. I am not going to give advice about remedying the evil, as the *Star* suggested, as I do not believe that this evil is universal. Servants and mistresses in Montreal at present are just on as good terms as they used to be. Only one suggestion I would make, and that is, that servants and mistresses would introduce the system of exchanging references, instead of having them one-sided, as at present. This would prevent a good deal of misunderstanding. The one girl would find out more easily from the former girl whether the mistress would suit her or not. One cause of trouble between girls and mistresses is, that there is not a proper understanding before engaging.

I am going to give one instance of incivility extending from the mistress to the daughter, and then I shall conclude for the present. In the early part of last summer I was going round selling goods in the west end of the city, I think the case in question was on Fort street. I called at the side door, and after a few words of conversation with the servant girl, I sold her some goods. The girl of the house was standing close by, I think she would be about twelve years of age. She wanted to see the article the servant had bought, and after handling it for a little while, instead of handing it back to the servant, she threw it on the floor. The servant girl, naturally enough, remonstrated, stating that was not proper conduct. The little girl not wishing to be taught moral philosophy by the servant, told her not to be so saucy with her or she would tell her mother. The servant answered that she did not care what she would tell her mother, she would not stay very long with her. Says I to myself, says I, You or your mother is not much. Like mother like daughter. These are the kind of ladies (? ?) that have been the cause of the present agitation. If the respectable ladies will only keep out of the agitation, they will be all right. No one intends to hurt them, on the contrary, I believe this agitation will only be the more creditable in the end to our Montreal ladies.

On the other hand, I have known girls who have tried hard to cheat me, without succeeding in so doing, but getting themselves into a muddle for their pains. I have one such case before my

mind now. She was in service with a very respectable, kind and sensible lady on St. Antoine street. This lady was very forbearing with her, because her people were in poor circumstances, her father being blind. To pay evil for good, this girl left without giving one hour's notice. In cases like that, it would be only fair and just that ladies should always have the privilege of retaining at least two week's wages, to make sure that the girl will give her warning in time enough, say two weeks, to give her an opportunity to secure another one.

To conclude, the best rule to settle this or any other question, is the rule that our Saviour gave: Do to others as you would that others should do to them. Let the mistresses treat their servants as they would like to be treated if they were servants themselves. Let the servants treat their mistresses as they would like to be treated if they were in their place. This I found to be a good rule to get over my own difficulties in a good many instances. Matt. vii., 12; Luke vi., 31.

It is not hard to perceive the policy of the *Star* in the present agitation. It wants to be instrumental in founding an institution, but I will see it done before I believe that the *Star* is going to have it all its own way. Let me conclude, as I started, with the statement that the Montreal ladies, as a whole, are second to none in the whole world in all those qualities that constitute a true lady.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *Daily News*.

SIR,—As one whose time is employed mostly in canvassing private houses, I have personally come in contact with a great many mistresses and servants in Montreal within the last twelve months, so I would like to answer the Three Matrons in a few words. The majority of mistresses and servants in Montreal have comparatively little interest in the present agitation, as generally speaking they are getting along all right, and this agitation will not affect them either one way or the other. I know several Highland girls in Montreal who have been in the same house for years, and they have not even read the letters. For their own part they would not allow anyone to speak bad of their mistresses, as they say that they always used them well. Others I have known to have so much respect for their mistresses as to have their photos framed and hung up in their rooms. It seems to me the question is not whether the mistress or the servant of the present day is of poor or rich parents, or whether they have been highly educated or not, but whether they treat one another as Christians ought to treat one another.

Some of the so-called ladies cannot treat servants or others kindly because they are naturally rude. Let me just give you one or two instances. Last Christmas time I had occasion to call at a house on Metcalfe street. One of the girls told me to bring her some Christmas cards, and on coming back the *Lady* of the house spoke so rude to me that I went away without delivering my message. The same one told another one of her girls when she left that she must take her trunk right away, and the poor girl, a young widow, wept bitterly, and I got a cab at 10 p.m. to remove her trunks.

Another girl in the west end of Dorchester street wanted to get one of her friend's pictures enlarged, and she was in such dread of her mistress that she would not venture to go upstairs for the picture while her mistress was in. Another one on Argyle avenue nearly threw me down the steps last winter for ringing her bell and asking her a civil question. Another instance on Mance street, and the rude ladies will be represented in the four quarters of the city. A lady on Mance street, who wished to hire an

acquaintance of mine, the girl said to me that as I was canvassing I might call at this house and form an idea about the mistress. The day was rather cold, and I closed the outside porch door after me. The girl came to the door, and I told her I would like to show my samples to the mistress, and as I did not retire as if a lion or a bear was at my heels, the master of the house himself came from the top of the stairs to hurry me out. Now, Mr. Editor, need you be surprised that girls feel discontented serving such people as that. Several of them show their own ignorance by telling me when I show my samples saying that they never buy anything at the door.

The Three Matrons are not pleased at so many taking the side of the girls, perhaps they did not know before what public opinion about the likes of them was. They think that an injustice is done them by publishing so many letters in the *Star*. If the coat does not fit them why put it on. Perhaps they never saw themselves before in the looking glass of public opinion.

N. MURRAY,

506 St. James street.

FROM DOOR TO DOOR.

A CANVASSER'S EXPERIENCE OF SERVANTS AND MISTRESSES.

(To the Editor of the Witness.)

SIR,—One of your contemporaries has been making so much ado about "mistresses and servants." It will be a great mistake if people are led to understand that any such agitation is general between mistress and servant.

In following my business as a canvasser, I come in contact with a great many of the mistresses and servants of Montreal, and with your permission I would like to state a few facts about those mistresses (the minority) who are the cause of all this noise. Some of the mistresses not only hire the servants to do their work, but they also undertake to make rules for the servants in matters that do not at all concern them. In some cases when the door bell is rung the servant comes to the door, and the mistress comes to the top of the stairs. If it happens to be an agent or a canvasser or a pedler, the mistress tells the servant to "tell that man that they never buy anything at the door." Now the man, if he has common sense, never asks such a question as whether they buy anything at the door or not—he merely wishes to carry on his business with the servant in his own way. In nine cases out of ten I find that these are the sort of mistresses who are engaged in this controversy. How would some of our down-town clerks like it if the master was continually at their elbow meddling in matters in themselves indifferent?

A good mistress as a rule gets a good servant, and a good servant is too high-spirited to put up very long with an unreasonable, impertinent mistress. There has been a great deal said about some of the mistresses being "upstarts," and that the reason was that they did not belong to the aristocracy as our friend, the Englishwoman, stated. I think that is quite an insult to our Montreal ladies, where I believe there are as many ladies in the true sense of the word as there are in any city of the world of the same size and population. The unladylike ladies, I am glad to say, I found to be the exception. I could fill a large volume with instances of good and bad mistresses in Montreal.

TORMAID.

APPENDIX.

There is another point worthy of inquiring into, and that is, that some of the mistresses deliberately teach the girls to speak lies. In a good many cases when the mistress is asked for some business, she tells the servant to say that she is not in. How can they complain if these servants sometimes pay them back in their own coin. In reference to what some of the Ladies (?) call the agency nuisance, I would just give some of the ladies (?) that think they are so smart, a pointer. They are themselves to blame for a great deal of the annoyance, I have no doubt they receive in a great many cases. Because that shrewd class of business men, such as machine and organ agents and other canvassers, are prepared with all their ingenuity to torment the likes of them, whereas they would have comparatively little annoyance if they took in the situation in a proper way. There is still another side to the Servant Question more worthy of consideration if any than the rest, and that is the Sabbath Question. A great many of the servants, both male and female, have to do a great deal of work on Sunday that is neither the work of necessity nor mercy. The commandment says, "But on the Seventh day, thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant or the maidservant, or thy cattle, or thy stranger that is within thy gates." Let me quote the Apostle Paul on the subject in conclusion, Col. iii, 21, to iv, 1: "Servants obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart fearing God, and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, etc." To the masters also, he says, "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a master in heaven." Also, in Ephesians vi, 5 to 9. See Leviticus xxv, 43, "And thou shalt not rule over him with rigour but shalt fear thy God."

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